

OPEN SOME DOORS THIS ADVENT

Reflection for First Sunday in Advent

This weekend we once again begin a new liturgical year with the holy season of Advent, which prepares us to celebrate the coming of Jesus. Advent is very much about opening the doors of our heart to Jesus. The following reflection on Advent was written by Sr. Joyce Rupp—a very popular writer and speaker.

*Advent is a season of opening doors. It is a time to deepen and strengthen our relationship with the Holy One so that more of the divine presence within us shines through and offers a welcome to others. It is a season to open the doors of our hearts so that we can both give and receive this love. One of the ways we can do this is by **seeing ourselves and others as doors** through which the divine presence continually seeks an entrance.*

Someone's Knocking

Each of us has a sacred door. It is the place where we meet the Holy One in our midst. In Warner Sallman's artistic portray of Revelation 3:20, Jesus stands at the door and knocks. It is the door of the human heart to which Jesus comes and awaits an invitation to enter. Sallman knowingly omitted the doorknob on the outside, recognizing that the door to the heart can only be opened from within. The knobless door indicates that we hold the power of welcome or refusal. It is our choice.

*The movement of greeting someone at a physical door is much like the process of spiritual growth. We must first be aware that there is someone actually at the door. Sometimes there is a gentle rap, at other times a very loud knocking or a melodious doorbell. **Attentiveness and listening are essential to the spiritual life. Advent is a wake-up call, alerting us and challenging us to become more aware of the divine visitor who faithfully knocks at the door of our lives.***

The metaphor of the door in scripture encourages this alertness and wakefulness. In Proverbs, Holy Wisdom speaks: "Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors" (Prov. 8:34). In similar fashion the lover describes attentiveness to the Beloved: "I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking. 'Open to me...'" (Song of Sol. 5:2).

Readiness to open the door is essential for a meeting to occur. Attentiveness to the divine presence is a must. This is the reason why busyness can be destructive to our Advent experience. Being busy in itself is not a bad thing, but it is detrimental when it keeps us from being ready to open the door or from recognizing that someone awaits our welcome.

***Once we are aware of someone waiting at the door we must decide whether to open it.** How do we respond when someone knocks or rings the doorbell of our house? Our response can be much the same as when someone stands at the door of our heart. At first, we may be cautious, peering carefully to see who it is. We might feel irritated when the knock comes, believing we have no time to answer to door or doubtful that our house is clean or beautiful enough for a welcome. We may be guarded and hesitant with fear, or curt and abrupt, taking care of business quickly. We might even ignore the sound at the door completely.*

On the other hand, we could be waiting for someone we know and appreciate, like the watchful servants in the parable "who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks" (Luke: 12:35). In this case, we might be elated when we see who is there, knowing the one at the door is a friendly neighbor or a loved one who will ease our loneliness and anxiety or gift us with the goodness of his or her presence. ("The most exquisite fruits are at our doors." Song of So. 7:14.)

How we welcome other human beings into our lives is how we welcome Emmanuel, god-With-Us (Matt. 25:31:46). In my travels I spend a lot of time in other peoples' space. I notice how I am met at the door of their homes. Usually, there is only glad welcome and generous hospitality extended to me. But sometimes people welcome me with their words and not with their hearts. It is obvious that I am an interruption or an intrusion into their well-ordered lives. I

sense their anxiety and concern about doing things right or “looking good”. They apologize profusely about their unclean or crowded space or simply usher me to my room without the warmth of welcome.

Please Disturb

Hospitality is at the heart of the Advent season. In her book, *The Reed of God* (Sheed & Ward), Caryll Houselander describes the Annunciation as the Spirit tapping on the door of Mary’s heart: “It was as if the human race were a little dark house, without light or air, locked and latched. . . But one day a girl opened the door. Seas of light swept through it, and the light remained in it; and in that little house a Child was born.”

Mary was a beautiful, faith-filled door. When the divine visitor tapped on her heart, she was at first hesitant and afraid. Full of questions and concerns, she paused for clarity before she opened the door. But she did not let her hesitations keep her from extending a welcome to love. With her “Yes, you may come in,” Mary created a hospitable space within herself. She leaned on her faith for support as she opened the door wide to the Spirit. Because of her hospitality to divine mystery, Jesus entered this world through the door of her welcoming womb (Luke 1:26-38).

Mary is every person who has stood at the door and felt fearful of the future with its unknown direction. She is every person who has experienced self-doubt or has had a totally unexpected event upset them. She is each of us struggling with our own fears and hesitations when the Holy One taps on the door of our life asking for an entrance.

Our fears can keep us from opening a door that needs to be opened. There’s often a price to be paid for being open: confusion, doubt, uncertainty, unsettledness, the possibility of being hurt by what others say or do to us. Opening the door to another may cost us our precious time and energy. We may have to “go the extra mile”. Yet, in the end, as with Mary, we receive so much more than we have given. It must also be said that at times our fears can protect us by refusing to open a door to someone or something that is not good for us (Discernment is crucial.)

Sometimes opening the door of our hearts comes easily for us. Elizabeth opened wide the door of her home and of her generous heart. Her hospitality to Mary was boundless. She extended total receptivity to her young, pregnant relative who carried the Christ within her. Joy filled the older woman when she heard Mary’s voice greeting her. As Mary entered Elizabeth’s home, Elizabeth was so excited and filled with love that the babe within her womb leapt for joy (Luke 1:39-45). In contrast, Zachariah refused to open the door of his heart by disbelieving the power and mystery of the divine (Luke 1:5-21; 57-80).

We have all closed the door to our heart at certain times. We shut our inner door to the Holy One when we refuse the truth, love, and goodness that is offered to us in times of discouragement and difficulty. We refuse to open the door when we choose to be alienated from others or from ourselves. We keep out love when we bar the door to those who need our kindness and compassion. Each time we find ourselves closed or blocked, it is a call to sweep out whatever keeps us from receiving our divine guest.

Our Inner Doors

The physical doors of our everyday lives can remind us to be aware and open to the Holy one who awaits our welcome in whatever form that might be. What does the door of our heart look like? Is it transparent glass? Can people see into our hearts and find authenticity there? Perhaps our door is made of heavy thick wood or metal, very sturdy but also serving as a strong barrier. The door to our heart might be a flexible gate or an easily moveable door, able to welcome people of other ideas, faiths, and cultures without alarm. At another time our heart could be a revolving door without direction, constantly going around in circles.

Sometimes we can tell the quality of our welcome by the message that hangs on the door of our heart. It might say something like “Enjoy Your Stay” or “Room Service” or “Enter at Your Own Risk” or “Do Not Disturb” or “No Trespassing”.

It is in our most ordinary moments that the Holy One stands at the door, startling us with hope. Advent encourages us to be ready to hear the knock on the door and to welcome his loving presence ever more fully. Each physical door we enter or pass through during Advent can remind us that each coming and going of our daily routine is an opportunity

to meet God-With-Us. It is up to us to welcome Emmanuel. The Key is in the lock. The divine visitor is at the door. We need only to open it wide with our welcome.

You may have read the above beautiful column rather quickly. I suggest this coming week that you make time to re-read it slowly and meditatively, pausing to reflecting on those thoughts that especially spoke to you. Then you might ask yourself the following questions:

- What spoke to you most in the article?
- What does the article ask of you during this Advent season?
- To whom or what do you need to open your heart more fully?